

Application No.: 09/996,707

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A produce handling machine, comprising:
a produce receiver having a generally horizontal receiving surface and at least two opposing sides adjacent thereto to retain produce on the receiving surface;
a produce washer, adjacent the produce receiver, for washing the produce as it is transported therethrough;
a water absorber, adjacent said produce washer, for movably supporting the produce and to remove excess water from the produce as it exits the washer; and
a foam padding covering at least one stationary produce-contacting surface of the machine, wherein said foam padding is intended to reduce bruising of the produce and where said foam padding is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes within the padding.
2. (original) The machine of claim 1, wherein said water absorber includes a plurality of donut-style rolls for supporting the produce, and where said rolls are manufactured from an open-cell foam that has anti-microbial properties.
3. (currently amended) The machine of claim 2, wherein the anti-microbial properties of the open-cell foam are achieved by adding an anti-microbial agent during the manufacture of the foam.
4. (currently amended) The machine of claim 3, wherein the open-cell foam is a latex foam.
5. (currently amended) The machine of claim 2, further comprising a plurality of wringer rolls, located in contact with the donut-style rolls, to compress the open-cell foam and thereby

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eliminate water attracted to surfaces within the open-cell foam.

6. (original) The machine of claim 1, wherein the foam padding covering at least one produce-contacting surface of the machine, is a closed-cell foam.

7. (original) The machine of claim 1, wherein the foam padding covering at least one produce-contacting surface of the machine further includes a flexible outer layer of vinyl.

8. (original) The machine of claim 7, wherein the flexible outer layer of vinyl is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes on exposed surfaces thereof.

9. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a roller inspection conveyor for transporting the produce while turning it for inspection, wherein the inspection conveyor includes a plurality of parallel conveyor rolls and where said conveyor rolls include at least an outer layer of foam having anti-microbial properties.

10. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a sizer, wherein the sizer has at least one drop surface that is covered with padding and where the padding is produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

11. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising packing table wherein the packing table has at least one surface that is covered with padding and where the padding is produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

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12. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a drape produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

13. (original) The machine of claim 1, wherein said produce washer further comprises scrubber rubber produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

14. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a brush within the produce washer, wherein the brush has bristles produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

15. (currently amended) A produce handling machine, comprising:
at least one stationary produce-contacting surface; and
a foam padding covering at least a portion of said stationary produce-contacting surface of the machine, wherein said foam padding is intended to reduce bruising of the produce contacting the stationary surface and where said foam padding is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes on the padding.

16. (original) The produce handling machine of claim 15, wherein the foam padding is a closed-cell foam.

17. (original) The machine of claim 15, wherein the foam padding further includes a continuous yet flexible outer layer.

18. (original) The machine of claim 17, wherein the flexible outer layer comprises a vinyl compound formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes on surfaces coming in contact with the produce.

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19. (original) The machine of claim 15, wherein said foam padding is molded to shape.

20. (currently amended) ~~A feed handling apparatus,~~The produce handling machine of claim 1 further comprising a removable produce handling apparatus associated with the produce handling machine and for receiving produce processed thereon, said produce handling apparatus including:

a stationary member for the support of a ~~feed item~~produce thereon; and
a covering for at least one ~~feed~~produce-contacting surface of the member, wherein said covering is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes.

21. (currently amended) The ~~feed~~produce handling apparatus of claim 20, wherein said covering comprises a foam padding.